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LOSS OF TEETH AS A DISQUALIFICATION FOR MILITARY SERVICE.

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Read before the Academy, at Topeka, December 31, 1902.

THE relation of the teeth to the general economy is nowhere better shown than in the army recruiting office. In the selection of men for military service, a fixed standard is necessary, in order to prevent the enlistment of men who would not make effective soldiers. Tripler's Manual, the recognized authority in the examination of recruits, gives "teeth white and in good condition" as a characteristic of an able-bodied man. In the time of the war of the rebellion, the examining surgeon was directed to ascertain "whether he has a sufficient number of teeth in good condition to masticate his food properly, and to tear his cartridge quickly and with ease. The cartridge is torn with the incisor, canine or bicuspid teeth." Section 20 of paragraph 85, "Revised Regulations," was more explicit, stating that men should be rejected who had suffered "total loss of all the front teeth, the eye-teeth, and first molars, even if only of one jaw." This was a very low standard, as the *total loss* of a smaller number of teeth than here indicated interferes with proper mastication. Still, the reports show that nearly three per cent. of the men examined from 1861 to 1865 failed to measure up to this standard. The following figures are taken from a report issued from the provost marshal general's bureau in 1875:

Nativity.	No. examined.	No. rejected.	Percentage.
United States, white.....	315,620	10,043	3.1820
United States, colored	25,828	222	.8595
United States, Indians.....	121	0
Total, United States.....	341,569	10,265	3.0052
Foreign born.....	159,599	2,701	1.6923
Totals.....	501,068	12,966	2.5877

Through the courtesy of George M. Sternberg, late surgeon general of the army, I am able to present corresponding data covering the period of our recent war with Spain for comparison with the table given above. The directions to the examining officers are now as follows:

"The condition of the teeth is to be considered solely with reference to the proper mastication of food. If there are not enough in the mouth for this purpose, food is swallowed without the necessary preparation, and indigestion, with imperfect nutrition, and its consequent evils, are the result. If several of the teeth are decayed, especially about the crown, it is probable that before the ex-

piration of an enlistment they will be so far destroyed as to render mastication imperfect; hence, men who have lost the front teeth from decay and have many unsound back teeth should be rejected. The loss of the front teeth through accident is not cause for rejection, provided a sufficient number of the back teeth are sound. Unless an applicant has at least four sound double teeth, one above and one below on each side of the mouth, and so opposed as to serve the purpose of mastication, he should be rejected. Exception may be made by the adjutant general in the case of a soldier who desires to reenlist, if a report is made showing his age, physical condition as to nutrition, and the number and location of the sound teeth. If the front teeth remain and the double teeth are gone, rejection is demanded. Artificial substitutes cannot be considered as equivalent in value to the natural teeth, or as removing the disability on this account for military service."

In the years 1898, 1899 and 1900 there were 181,477 candidates for enlistment examined, and, in accordance with the instructions, 2326, or about one and one-third per cent., were rejected, as follows:

	No. examined.	No. rejected.	Percentage.
White.....	168,655	2,326	1.380
Colored.....	12,822	90	.702
Totals.....	181,477	2,416	1.331

At first, it would seem that the percentage of rejection was much smaller during the Spanish war than during the war of the rebellion. But the element of age has not yet been considered. The men who were examined for enlistment in the Spanish war were, as a rule, young, strong, energetic men, who desired and expected to be accepted for service. A large ratio of the men who were examined late in the rebellion were past the age that was taken as a maximum during the Spanish war. The relation of age to the percentage of rejection is indicated in this table, which gives the result of the examination of more than a third of a million men in the latter part of the rebellion:

Age.	No. examined.	No. rejected.	Percentage.
Under 20.....	58,952	68	.1153
20 to 25.....	78,639	647	.8227
25 to 30.....	56,711	1,114	1.9643
30 to 35.....	45,777	1,783	3.8950
35 to 40.....	50,456	2,887	5.7218
40 and over.....	43,786	3,801	8.6809
Totals.....	334,321	10,300	3.0809

Earlier in the war the ratio of rejection was lower. Of 806,610 men examined in the first years of the war, 12,904, or 1.599 per cent., were rejected; but 501,002 of these were drafted men, of whom 9646, or 1.925 per cent., were exempted.

The ratio of colored men rejected during the rebellion was about one-fourth that of white; now it is more than one-half—this notwithstanding the fact that the colored recruit of to-day is younger in proportion. To quote again from Tripler's Manual: "It has been

observed that for acceptable colored recruits the age of twenty-five or twenty-six is practically the maximum, because after that they are liable to be physically stiffened and mentally dulled." (The limit of thirty-five is the extreme for recruits under ordinary circumstances.) The negro does not seem to have been improved physically by freedom.

To sum up in a single sentence, I would say that the man of to-day does not have better teeth than the man of forty years ago; and the negro of to-day does not have as good teeth as his grandfather had in slavery.